

Hartlepool Psychology Team – Support and Advice

CORONAVIRUS (Covid-19) ADVICE FOR PARENTS SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD'S EMOTIONAL WELLBEING



The Hartlepool Psychology Team have brought together our psychological knowledge along with information from reputable resources to support you at home during this uncertain time. We are aware there is a lot of information available via social media, however, we recognise that this can feel overwhelming and parents can be unsure about what advice to follow. We hope you find this a simple, clear guide to supporting your child at home.

How might my child be feeling?

The current Covid-19 situation is likely to be a stressful and worrying time for many children and young people. A number of factors will contribute to this, including:

- Being out of school for an indeterminate length of time, with reduced access to outdoor play facilities and social spaces.
- Families living in close proximity for extended periods of time.
- Uncertainty around when they will return to school, see wider familiar adults and their friends.
- A lack of control around how it might impact them and wider people they are close to.
- News and social media sources providing conflicting evidence and potentially sensationalising the impact of the virus.

Whatever your child's age or stage of development, they are likely to have sensed change and felt anxiety in the recent weeks. It is important to remember that different people react differently to significant events. We have found that children can show their awareness, uncertainty and emotions in a number of ways such as physical symptoms (i.e. poorly tummy), acting out ('challenging' behaviour) and withdrawal behaviour (becoming very quiet, not wanting to join in at home). Different reactions are normal and are ok. Being attuned to your child and recognising changes in behaviour will help you understand how they are coping.

How do I support my child's emotional wellbeing?

With the support of the Hartlepool Psychology Team, most schools have adopted an emotional wellbeing framework from the Action for Happiness (www.actionforhappiness.org). Therefore your child may well already be familiar with the approach. It is based on lots of psychological research and evidence.





In responding to the Covid-19 situation, there are four key principles:

1. KEEP CALM

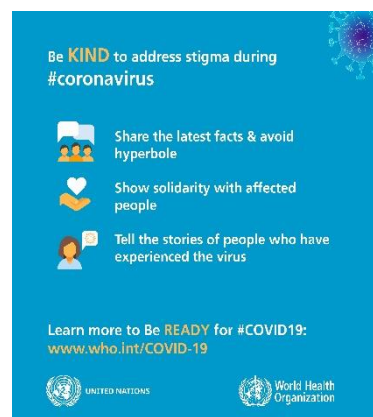
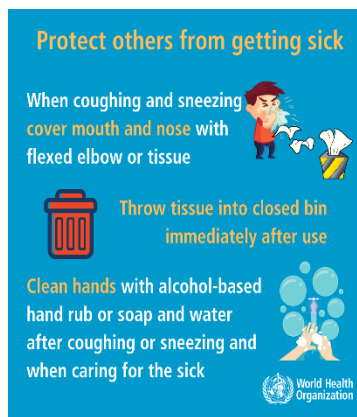
- **Talk to young people about what is going on:** It might be helpful to start by finding out what they already know as they are likely to have picked up on conversations. When sharing information, be truthful in the facts you share, but also be aware of their age and developmental stage. Adjust the amount of detail you provide to support their level of understanding. The use of cartoons, pictures, role play or stories may help. It is important that they feel comfortable talking to you about Coronavirus as you will be the best source of information to reassure them. It is also possible they will talk to their friends, which may involve misinformation, so keep checking in with your child over time and as situations or government advice changes.
- **Allow children to ask questions:** Providing space to ask questions can help to ease anxiety. It is natural that children will have questions and worries about the Coronavirus. It is ok to say “I don’t know” because at the moment there will be a number of questions to which we don’t have the answers.
- **Normalise feelings and worries:** Stress and anxiety are a *normal* response to *abnormal* situations. Safety and having a sense of control are two of our basic needs for good psychological wellbeing, and Covid-19 is making many of us feel unsafe and not in control. Try to find out more specifically what it is they are worried about (e.g. not seeing their friends, the health of their grandparents). Some children and young people, particularly those who are older, may be able to self-manage their stress, but this is more difficult for younger children. Adults will need to help younger children to understand and name their emotions, and help them to do things that will reduce their stress level.
- **Put in place routine and structure:** Having a plan for the day can be reassuring. A consistent routine helps everyone feel secure and provides a sense of stability. So, for example, you might want to still get up at the same time as you would usually on a school day, and get dressed for the day to signal that you are all ready for learning and activities. Where you have to make a change to your routine, give honest but brief explanations and don’t worry if your routine does not always run smoothly.
- **Try to keep academic work in one place:** this will help you to keep a work/home boundary. Also consider ways to signal the end of working, e.g. a song or a dance, to support transitions between tasks.



- **Provide reassurance about cancellation of exams:** The uncertainty and lack of control linked to the cancellation of exams may cause significant worry for some teenagers. Provide time to actively listen to these worries. You could explain to them that the current advice is that the government plans to use a 'calculated grade process', which takes into account a range of evidence, including non-exam assessment and mock results. How this will work practically is still to be finalised by the government. When results are released, if pupils do not feel their calculated grade reflects their performance, they will be offered the opportunity to sit the exam, as soon as is reasonably possible. More comprehensive guidance regarding this can be found on the www.gov.uk website.

2. STAY WISE

- **Be aware of the amount of media coverage to which your child is exposed:** Don't completely shield them from everything but it's important to find a balance. Supervise screen time and ensure appropriate filters are put in place.
- **Reassure children and young people that the risk of the virus is low to them:** Children can sometimes believe they are responsible for things that are clearly beyond their control. Reassure children that it is the role of adults to keep them safe but that they can help themselves and others by following the government guidance. In addition, reassure them that it is unlikely that children will get seriously ill from the virus. Share this information with them and be curious about their worries.
- **Reinforce positive behaviours to help prevent the virus spreading:** Teach children and young people the practical skills around how to wash their hands properly and explain why they are doing it. Remind children and set an example around following the government advice about staying at home.



3. BE KIND

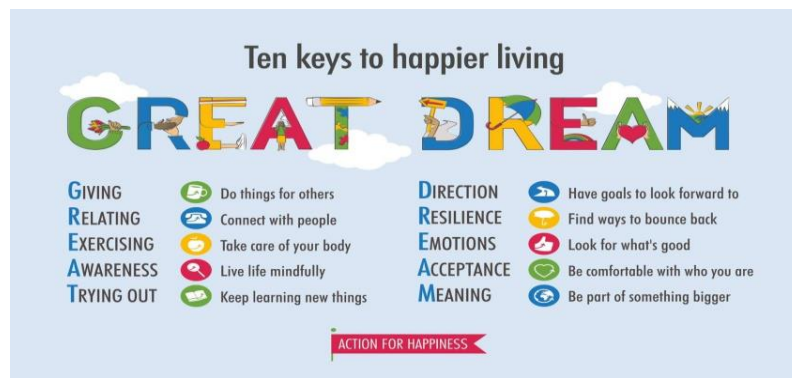
- **Additional comfort:** Be aware that your child might need and want more close comfort with you (e.g. cuddles, touch, and being near you) during this time. They may particularly feel anxious about separation.



- **Avoid putting too much pressure on academic work:** It is more important to spend time together, build relationships and enjoy shared activities. Optimise fun opportunities and play. Play is fundamental to children’s wellbeing and development.
- **Be aware of your own response:** Children and young people may pick up on, and mirror, your behaviours and responses. If you are feeling anxious or overwhelmed, you may need to limit how much you express this in front of them. In order to help others, we need to look after ourselves first so that we don’t burn out, so take regular breaks and ask for help if you need it.

4. ENGAGE IN THE 10 KEYS TO HAPPIER LIVING

Research conducted by Action for Happiness has shown that while everyone’s path to happiness is different, these 10 things consistently tend to have a positive impact on people’s overall wellbeing. The first five relate to how we interact with the world in our daily activities and the second five come more from inside us and depend on our attitude to life. This could be something you think about with your child as well as something to reflect on to help your own wellbeing at this time of uncertainty.



Some suggestions for you and your child include:

Giving - make some extra food and drop a meal off on the doorstep for a friend who is unwell. And encourage friends to make wise & kind choices too.

Relating - Help children to stay connected with their peers. Friendships are a key resilience factor. Explore wider ways they can stay in contact with peers, such as through video calls. This will help to reassure them that others are well.

Exercising - Look after yours and your child’s body. Move your body each day even if indoors dancing round the living room. Load up on healthy fruit & veg to support your immune system.

Awareness - take some time to notice the world around you and be grateful for the good things. At the end of each day, write these things down so that you can look back on them. This helps us see that even in really difficult times, there is always something to appreciate.

Trying out - Make the most of it. If you end up self-isolating or have events cancelled, how can you make the most of that time? E.g. learning a new skill.

Direction - set an intention, e.g. make a personal commitment to make a positive impact each day for yourself and those around you, even if it is something small.



Resilience – Draw on skills you have used in the past that have helped you or your child to manage other difficult situations in life in the past and use those skills to help you manage your emotions during this challenging time.

Emotions – If a young person seems worried, it may be good to distract them through absorption activities (activities children can really focus on to distract them, such as colouring in or focusing on a puzzle) or find ways to help them to relax such as through mindfulness (e.g. Headspace or Calm apps) relaxation techniques or writing down or drawing their thoughts and feelings.

Acceptance – help children accept that while the changes and the regulations that are in place might feel frustrating or an inconvenience, this is the right thing to do to save lives.

Meaning – recognise that we can all make a difference in helping to reduce the impact of COVID-19 and this is vitally important for global happiness and wellbeing.

What resources are there for young people?

- **Kooth:** Free, online counselling for pupils aged 11-18. [Kooth.com](https://www.kooth.com) is a safe, confidential and non-stigmatised way for young people to receive advice, support and easy access to an online community of peers and a team of experienced counsellors. Staffed by fully trained and qualified counsellors who are available until 10pm each night, 365 days per year, Kooth provides a much needed out of hours' service, making it a powerful early prevention resource.
- **Young Minds:** Young minds provide advice to support teens and young adults about what to do if they are anxious about the Coronavirus. The main focus is on self-care and they provide further information about how young people can manage their mental health if self-isolating (<https://youngminds.org.uk>)
- **BBC Newsround:** The BBC Newsround site has a comprehensive section on the Coronavirus to support young people in their understanding of the Coronavirus. It provides practical tips, such as how to wash your hands, in addition to support if a child feels worried (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround>)
- **Coping skills for kids** - Provides a number of resources to support children to reduce anxiety levels (<https://copingskillsforkids.com/calming-anxiety>)
- **The Mix** - Provides information, support and a listening ear to under 25s (<https://www.themix.org.uk/>)

What resources are there for parents?

- **UK Government Covid-19 pages:** These pages are updated frequently to reflect their current advice and guidance (www.gov.uk)
- **Mind UK:** Mind has an excellent page providing general advice about supporting wellbeing (www.mind.org.uk)



- **Head space:** This is a free resource that provides guided meditations, mindfulness exercises and support if you have trouble sleeping (www.headspace.com)
- **Action for Happiness:** provides a range of resources and ideas to help towards happier living (www.actionforhappiness.org)

Acknowledgements:

Information has been collated from: Action for Happiness, The British Psychological Society, the Division of Educational and Child Psychologists, www.edpsy.org, Wiltshire Council, West Sussex Council, www.gov.uk, the World Health Organisation and Young Minds.

